

Response Priorities - Emergency, Immediate, and Routine

Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families

Policy: 500.0015

Effective Date: July 7, 1984 Revised Date: July 6, 1987 Version: 2

Call Floor personnel and, at times, Investigative personnel must decide how quickly to respond to each report of child abuse or neglect based on a number of variables. These include the kinds of allegations made and the level of harm or risk of harm to the child. Although harm itself is usually evident, risk of harm is harder to assess and requires a certain level of training, judgment, and expertise on the part of the worker/supervisor. It also requires the interpretation of certain other factors specific to the case situation which, when applied to the allegations, more clearly defines the risk of harm to the child.

The Department has prioritized Call Floor and Investigative responses to all child abuse and neglect reports into three (3) categories: Emergency, Immediate, and Routine. Each response has general criteria, a time limit for the Call Floor to process the report, and a time limit for the initiation of the actual investigation.

The response priority is initially set by the Call Floor worker and is indicated on the CPS report. However, upon review of the data by the Call Floor Supervisor, the Investigative Supervisor, and/or the assigned CPI, the response priority can be upgraded. A response priority may not be downgraded without prior Administrative approval. Any change in the response priority must be indicated on the CPS report. If the priority is down-graded, this change must be documented by the Assistant Director/designee in a Case Activity Note. If there is a question as to which response priority to use in a particular case situation, the more urgent priority should be chosen.

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Response Priorities - Emergency, Immediate, and Routine

Procedure From Policy 500.0015: Response Priorities - Emergency, Immediate, and Routine

- A. Call Floor workers initially set the response priority for each referral of child abuse or neglect. Response priorities delineate the time limit for the Call Floor to process the CPS report and for the initiation of an investigation. Response priorities are categorized into three (3) types:
 - 1. Emergency Response - Call Floor must process the CPS report within ten (10) minutes after the call is completed. A CPI must respond to the report within ten (10) minutes of assignment.
 - 2. Immediate Response - Call Floor must process the CPS report within one (1) hour after the call is completed. A CPI must respond to the report within the shift in which the call was received.
 - 3. Routine Response - Call Floor must process the CPS report within one (1) hour after the call is completed. A CPI must respond to the report within twenty-four (24) hours of assignment.
- B. Categories of response priorities have general criteria using the level of harm or risk of harm to the child.
 - 1. Emergency Response criteria includes:
 - a. Child in imminent danger of physical harm.
 - b. Child abandoned and in imminent danger (otherwise Immediate Response).
 - c. Child unsupervised and in imminent danger (otherwise Immediate Response).
 - d. Family may flee or child may disappear.
 - e. Child at hospital for examination/parents present and awaiting questioning.
 - f. Child death due to alleged child abuse or neglect/other children in family.
 - g. Other circumstances of the case constitute an emergency.
 - 2. Immediate Response criteria include:
 - a. Alleged abuse or neglect in which the child is not in imminent danger but other risk factors are present.
 - b. Child abandoned but not in imminent danger.
 - c. Child unsupervised but not in imminent danger.
 - d. Child hospitalized on seventy-two (72) hour hold.
 - e. Child held by police/physician/nurse practitioner for DCYF placement.
 - f. Other but not emergency.
 - 3. Routine Response criteria is used for all other reports in which there is minimal risk of harm to the child.

Factors Specific to the Case Situation to Define Risk to the Child

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- A. While certain reports clearly mandate the response priority to be used, other reports are less detailed and require a certain level of training, judgment, and expertise on the part of the worker/supervisor to make this decision. Certain factors specific to the case situation, when applied to the allegations, may more clearly define risk to the child, including:
 - 1. The child's age, sex, physical, and mental condition.
 - 2. The mental and physical condition of the caretaker(s).
 - 3. The mental and physical condition and/or location of the alleged perpetrator(s).
 - 4. Any history of prior incidents/harm to the child.
 - 5. The need for medical attention for the child.
 - 6. The nature and condition of the physical environment (safety/health).
- B. If there is a question as to which response priority to use in a particular case situation, the more urgent priority should be chosen.

Decision to Change a Particular Response Priority

Procedure From Policy 500.0015: Response Priorities - Emergency, Immediate, and Routine

- A. Upon review of the data by the Call Floor Supervisor, the Investigative Supervisor, and/or the assigned CPI, a decision may be made to change a particular response priority.
 - 1. For good cause a response priority can be upgraded at any time.
 - 2. At no time can a response priority be downgraded without prior Administrative approval.
 - 3. Any change in response priority must be indicated in a Case Activity Note. If downgraded, this change must be documented in a Case Activity Note by the approving Administrator.

Call Floor Functions

Procedure From Policy 500.0015: Response Priorities - Emergency, Immediate, and Routine

- A. If the child is in immediate danger and immediate police assistance is required, the Call Floor worker will:
 - 1. Instruct the caller to notify the police, and after terminating the call notify the police.
 - 2. Put the caller on hold and notify the police.
 - 3. Place a three-party (3) call with the police and the reporter.
- B. The Call Floor worker will search RICHIST for prior agency involvement.
- C. The Call Floor worker will complete a CPS report as completely as possible.
- D. For emergency situations the Call Floor worker will immediately notify the Call Floor Supervisor. The Supervisor will review the report and, regardless of how much information is missing, will forward the report to the Investigative Unit within ten (10) minutes after the call is terminated.
- E. For immediate and routine situations, the CPS report is processed in the usual manner.

Emergency Response of Children Left Unattended

Procedure From Policy 500.0015: Response Priorities - Emergency, Immediate, and Routine

- A. In a situation where children are left unattended and an emergency response is required, local police are asked to respond by the Call Floor worker.
- B. If the police find a caretaker present and appropriate (e.g., not intoxicated or having just returned home), the following procedures shall be followed. These procedures should not to be used for other allegations which the Department is clearly responsible to investigate:
 - 1. The Call Floor worker who contacts and receives the return call from the police notes directly on the CPS report the information that was reported and the name of the officer who responded.
 - 2. As long as there are no other allegations, the case will not be assigned as an investigation.
 - 3. These CPS reports will be assigned to the Assistant Director for Review and downgrade to Early Warning:
 - a. If downgraded, the Assistant Director will document the reason in a Case Activity Note and close the case.
 - b. If not downgraded, the Assistant Director will assign the case to the Investigative Assignment Supervisor.

Investigative Unit Functions

Procedure From Policy 500.0015: Response Priorities - Emergency, Immediate, and Routine

- A. The completed CPS report is reviewed by the Investigative Assignment Supervisor.
- B. The referral is assigned to a Child Protective CPI within the guidelines of the specific response priority,(i.e. ten (10) minutes, within the shift, etc.).
- C. An investigation is initiated within the specified response priority time frames.